

## 2.104 Free Access to Libraries for Minors

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### FREE ACCESS TO LIBRARIES FOR MINORS

#### An Interpretation of the “Library Bill of Rights”

Some library procedures and practices effectively deny minors access to certain services and materials available to adults. Such procedures and practices are not in accord with the “Library Bill of Rights” and are opposed by the American Library Association.

Restrictions take a variety of forms, including, among others, restricted reading rooms for adult use only, library cards limiting circulation of some materials to adults only, closed collections for adult use only, and interlibrary loan service for adult use only.

All limitations in minors’ access to library materials and services violate Article 5 of the “Library Bill of Rights,” which states, “The rights of an individual to the use of a library should not be denied or abridged because of his age. ...” Limiting access to some services and materials to only adults abridges the use of libraries for minors. “Use of the library” includes use of, and access to, all library materials and services.

Restrictions are often initiated under the assumption that certain materials are “harmful” to minors, or in an effort to avoid controversy with parents who might think so. The librarian who would restrict the access of minors to materials and services because of actual or suspected parental objection should bear in mind that he is not in loco parentis in his position as librarian. Individual intellectual levels and family backgrounds are significant factors not accommodated by a uniform policy based upon age.

In today’s world, children are exposed to adult life much earlier than in the past. They read materials and view a variety of media on the adult level at home and elsewhere. Current emphasis upon early childhood education has also increased opportunities for young people to learn and to have access to materials, and has decreased the validity of using chronological age as an index to the use of libraries. The period of time during which children are interested in reading materials specifically designed for them grows steadily shorter, and librarians must recognize and adjust to this change if they wish to maintain the patronage of young people.

The American Library Association holds that it is the parent – and only the parent – who may restrict his children – and only his children – from access to library materials and services. The parent who would rather his child did not have access to certain materials should so advise the child.

The word “age” was incorporated into Article 5 of the “Library Bill of Rights” as a direct result of a pre-conference entitled “Intellectual Freedom and the Teenager,” held in San Francisco in June 1967. One recommendation of the pre-conference participants was “that free access to all books in a library collection be granted to young people.” The pre-conference generally

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concluded that young people are entitled to the same access to libraries and to the materials in libraries as are adults and that materials selection should not be diluted on that account.

This does not mean, for instance, that issuing different types of borrowers' cards to minors and adults is, per se, contrary to the "Library Bill of Rights." If such practices are used for purposes of gathering statistics, the various kinds of cards carry no implicit or explicit limitations on access to materials and services. Neither does it mean that maintaining separate children's collections is a violation of the "Library Bill of Rights," provided that no patron is restricted to the use of only certain collections.

The Association's position does not preclude isolating certain materials for legitimate protection of irreplaceable or very costly works from careless use. Such "restricted-use" areas as rare book rooms are appropriate if the materials so classified are genuinely rare, and not merely controversial.

Unrestrictive selection policies, developed with care for principles of intellectual freedom and the "Library Bill of Rights," should not be vitiated by administrative practices which restrict minors to the use of only part of a library's collections and services.